Lambda Letters Project

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The Razor's Edge

by Boyce Hinman, Chief Lobbyist

Let's call 2000 the Year of the Razor because this was the year of razor-thin edges in countless elections across the country.

In Florida, according to the official result issued by that state's Secretary of State, Governor Bush beat Al Gore by barely 1,000 votes out of almost 6,000,000 votes cast. Nationwide, Gore beat Bush in the popular vote. But his margin of victory was just three tenths of one percent. In California's 5th State Senate District, Democrat Michael Machado defeated Republican Alan Nakanishi by just one half of one percent of the total of more than 290,000 votes cast.

In Washington State, Democrat Maria Cantwell won election to the U.S. Senate by just 2,229 votes out of the 2.4 million votes cast on November 7th. The vote was so close that election officials were unable to announce an official winner until November 23rd. It's interesting to note that the Cantwell victory means there will be a 50-50 tie between Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. Senate.

Under these circumstances, we have seen an unequaled, and very public, scramble for every single vote by candidates desperate to get the very few more votes needed to take them over the top. This year's election results provide vivid evidence of an exceptional opportunity for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community to make use of the situation.

The California Secretary of State's office estimates that there were 21,500,000 people eligible to vote in California this year. If just 2 percent of those potential voters are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered, that means there are 430,000 LGBT voters in California. That provides a rich trophy to whichever candidate attracts our votes. And that's just

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Time for LLP Annual Meeting

Lambda Letters' annual meeting takes place on Saturday, January 27th, at the Lambda Community Center, 1927 L Street, in Sacramento, starting at 9:30 AM. You are cordially invited to attend.

Boyce will deliver the State of the Project report, Board positions will be filled and a new budget adopted.

Decisions critical to the future path of the Project —including Project visibility, fundraising, publicity and direct lobbying—will be discussed.

All that and a chance for the board to meet our members. Please attend if you can. We have donuts!

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Lambda Letters Progress Report

Messages Collected

November, 2000	8,472 letters & e-mails
In all of 2000	120,362 letters & e-mails

Dollars Spent

December, 2000	$3,355
In all of 2000	$25,064

Can You Help?

Please support the very important work of the Lambda Letters Project with your contributions.

Lambda Letters Project

Mission Statement

To promote people of color, feminist, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and HIV/AIDS status advocacy, and to bring people of color, women, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered persons, and persons affected by or living with HIV/AIDS into full participation in American society.

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The Lambda Letters Project does not sell or loan its mailing list to anyone. We give no information about who is, or is not, a member of the Project. We do, occasionally, send mailings on behalf of other worthwhile organizations, but this is done by our own volunteers so that no other organization has the opportunity to copy our mailing lists.
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If so, you may register a complaint with the Department of Fair Employment and Housing. In cases of employment discrimination, call the department at (800) 884-1684. In cases of housing discrimination, call (800) 233-3212. The person answering the phone will schedule an appointment for you at the Department of Fair Employment and Housing Office which is closest to your home or place of employment.

Advertising Rates

Business-card sized ads (3½" × 2") $10 per issue, quarter-page ads $20 per issue, half-page ads $30 per issue, full-page ads $50 per issue. Deadline for payment and camera-ready copy, along with your name and phone number, is the 25th of each month.

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Women's Issue

How Many Must Die?

by Adrienne Lauby

Between November 8th and December 12th, five women died at the Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla. Lambda Letters members are joining other women's and prison advocates to call upon State Senator Richard Polanco's prison committee to conduct an immediate and thorough investigation of these deaths.

Senator Polanco's committee held hearings last October inside two California women's prisons that focused on medical neglect and other issues. The unusually high number of deaths since then continues to fuel outrage about the prison's medical neglect and the inability of prison management to administer the facility.

One concern raised during the hearings is the issue of the Medical Technical Assistants (MTAs) within Chowchilla. These people, whom women prisoners pass through to access health care, are also trained prison guards responsible for punishment. This twofold role often leads to MTAs confusing a prisoner's right to appropriate medical treatment with an opportunity for punishment. Such duality is not allowed in any other large state's prison system.

Under these conditions, treatable illnesses become terminal and HIV regimens are sometimes prescribed without any thought as to how they might interact with other medications or health conditions. Women often have to walk across prison grounds to get back to their cells after major surgery. According to the prison's own doctor, pain medication is not available to them should they happen to return from surgery between the 8 PM and 6 AM.

Breast lumps and vaginal tumors are left untreated for months, often addressed only when survival is no longer an option. A typical HIV-positive woman has no confidentiality because she must stand in a public medicine line. If she, like many prisoners with HIV, is co-infected with the liver-damaging hepatitis C, she may die due to the prison's liver-toxic AIDS formulary.

At least two women died last year when they were given tuberculosis medicine, despite the fact that they did not have the disease. The medicine killed their livers and their waist sizes bloated to over sixty inches in the months before they passed away. A woman with

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HIV/AIDS Issue

Educating Our New Legislature About HIV and AIDS

by Marty Martinez, AIDS Project East Bay

The November elections have resulted in many members entering the California State Assembly and State Senate for the first time. As you can imagine, many of these new members will be less than ideally informed about HIV and AIDS and the impact the disease is having across the state. The staff they hire—and even any new staff members of returning lawmakers—may need some basic updates on the state of HIV in California. Even veteran lawmakers need to be reminded that you care about HIV/AIDS issues and expect them to make headway against the disease in this new legislative session.

To this end we are asking you to write to your state Assemblymembers (there are more new members in the Assembly) to educate them about some basic AIDS issues and urge them to work hard on this issue in the upcoming year.

Here are some of the facts you can share in your letter:

- California is strongly impacted by HIV.
- One out of every seven persons with AIDS in the United States lives in California.
- There are at least 44,900 people in California living with AIDS, and an estimated additional 85,600 people infected with HIV who have not progressed to a full AIDS diagnosis.
- Over half of all new AIDS cases are among persons of color, with African Americans getting AIDS at a rate far in excess of their numbers in the population.
- African Americans make up 13 percent of the population but account for over 40 percent of new AIDS cases.

Please read and sign the enclosed letter, urging your Assemblymember to take action.

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LGBT Issue

Greatly Enhancing Domestic Partner Rights

by Sabrina McIntosh

Assemblywomen Carol Migden (D–San Francisco) and State Senator Sheila Kuehl (D–Santa Monica), along with Assembly Speaker Robert Hertzberg (D–Van Nuys), recently introduced AB 25, a bill that will allow greater benefits for registered domestic partners. AB 25 would give domestic partners new rights in 12 areas, including broadening the domestic registration regulations, allowing a domestic partner the right to make decisions regarding medical treatment, increasing insurance coverage for domestic partners, and establishing the right of survivorship for domestic partners.

Under the current laws regarding domestic partnerships, a partner is only allowed to visit the other partner in the hospital. AB 25 would authorize a domestic partner to make medical treatment decisions on behalf of a patient in certain circumstances. The rights of the partner would be enforced because AB 25 would make a violation of those rights a misdemeanor crime. AB 25 would also extend sick-time provisions by requiring employers to give sick time to employees who need to take care of their ill domestic partners or their partner's ill children. It would also change insurance requirements so that domestic partners are included. In addition, it would allow domestic partners to claim the cost of their partner's health care on their state income tax. This is a right currently given to married people but not domestic partners.

Another major change AB 25 would provide is including domestic partners in the establishments of conservatorships. The bill would require preference for selection of a conservator be given to the domestic partner and a person nominated by the domestic partner. This bill also would allow domestic partners to be lawful beneficiaries in their partner's will. Partners would be able leave their principal residence, automobiles, household, personal effects, or residuary estate to their domestic partner in a will. AB 25 also extends the rights of a decedent's spouse to domestic partners. This allows an "automatic" inheritance for domestic partners in regards to property that is not given away in a will.

Under current law, the spouse of a disabled person may make a claim for disability benefits. AB 25 would extend that right to domestic partners. It would also allow domestic partners to file wrongful death lawsuits and other issues of negligence.

The unemployment insurance laws would be extended to domestic partners as well. Currently, if an individual leaves his or her job to move with a spouse, they are allowed unemployment benefits. This bill would extend those rights to domestic partners. AB 25 would extend the domestic partnership registration laws to include opposite-sex couples if one of the partners is younger than 62. Currently, both partners must be over that age.

People of Color Issue

Education About Native Americans Needs Updating

by Marty Martinez

Californians live in the most culturally diverse state in the nation, yet our educational system's attempts to improve the diversity of the curricula continues to be inadequate, particularly in regard to Native Americans, whose diverse culture and contributions to American and world history continue to be downplayed or unexplored.

Particularly absent is education about the current status of Native Americans in California, in which 107 recognized tribal governments exist in the state. Current social, economic, and political issues regarding Native Americans are vastly unexplored in schools today.

SB 41 by Senator Deirdre Alpert (D–San Diego)—one of the first bills introduced in the new legislative session—seeks to address this lack of inclusiveness. The bill directs the California Department of Education to develop new curricula on California Native American culture, history, and tribal sovereignty to be included in educational materials for pupils in grades 1 through 12. The enclosed letter, directed to your state senator, urges him or her to support this needed educational reform.

January Legislative Update

You may be disappointed by the fact that we have only one LGBT-related bill in the following list. The lack of bills may be explained by the fact that it is still early in the legislative season. Legislators have lots of time to introduce bills. It may also be the result of the Governor Davis' opposition last year to most gay rights and domestic partner legislation. Legislators may feel it is useless to introduce such bills this year.

January 2001 begins a new, two-year session of the California Legislature. Any legislation that did not pass and get signed by the governor last year is now dead. New bills must be introduced by no later than February 23rd. However, all bills to be introduced must be submitted to the Legislative Counsel's office no later than January 26th, which creates the actual wording for each bill.

Here is a list of the bills we have found so far, which relate to our four topic areas.

AIDS/HIV Issues

AB 42 (Howard Wayne, D–San Diego)
Purpose: To require that, under certain circumstances, insurers pay for routine medical care when a person is involved in clinical trials of a new medicine or other therapy.
Status: Introduced.
LLP Position: Support.

SB 37 (Jackie Speier, D–San Mateo)
Purpose: To require health care service plans and certain disability insurers to provide coverage for all health care services related to the treatment of an enrollee or insured in a clinical trial meeting specified requirements.
Status: Introduced.
LLP Position: Support

Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Issues

AB 25 (Carole Migden, D–San Francisco)
Purpose: To allow opposite-gender senior citizen couples to register as domestic partners if one of them is over 62 (currently both must be over 62); allow people to make medical decisions for their partners under certain circumstances; require certain insurers to offer domestic partner coverage in their group health or disability plans; require many employers to allow employees time off to care for a sick domestic partner; require that a domestic partner be given preference when conservatorship is being considered for a person; add domestic partners to the statutory will form; remove the income tax liability for employer-provided domestic partner health insurance; and allow people to receive unemployment insurance, under certain circumstances, when they quit a job to follow a domestic partner. This bill does not reverse the feature of AB 26 (passed in 1999) which allows state and local governments to offer health insurance to the domestic partners of their retirees, but which terminates the insurance for the partner if the retiree dies first.
Status: Introduced.
LLP Position: Support, but urge reversal of the above feature of AB 26 so as to allow survivors of retirees to continue receiving health insurance.

People of Color Issues

AB 14 (Jackie Goldberg, D–Los Angeles)
Purpose: To require the State Board of Education to develop a mechanism for approval of local school districts' requests for school construction grants that gives priority to districts with severe overcrowding, that bus many students to other districts because of a lack of classroom space, or that have multitrack year-round education programs.
Status: Introduced.
LLP Position: Support.

AB 32 (Keith Richman, R–Chatsworth)
Purpose: To create the Cal-Health Program to be administered by the Managed Risk Medical Insurance Board. Under the program, the board would contract with health care service plans and disability insurers to provide a range of health care coverage options,

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Legislative Update

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including a standard uniform benefit package that would be available for purchase at subsidized rates by persons with limited incomes. This bill would require health care service plans and disability insurers to offer the standard uniform benefit package and also to offer a catastrophic high-deductible health care plan.
Status: Introduced.
LLP Position: Support.

AB 39 (Helen Thomson, D–Woodland)
Purpose: To allow, under certain circumstances, a tax credit to small employers who pay all or part of the cost of health insurance for their employees.
Status: Introduced.
LLP Position: Support.

AB 51 (Kevin Shelley, D–San Francisco)
Purpose: To make a statement regarding the intent of the Legislature to enact legislation that would establish a comprehensive program to identify and abate sources of lead exposure in the state's schools, and ensure that all lead hazards in all public schools in the state be identified and mitigated as quickly as possible. Most of the worst schools with lead-based paint would be in poorer ethnic neighborhoods.
Status: Introduced.
LLP Position: Support.

AB 59 (Gil Cedillo, D–Los Angeles)
Purpose: To expand the eligibility of children in low-income families for health insurance coverage through the Healthy Families Program. Bill says that children are eligible if they are receiving food stamps or participating in the California Special Supplemental Food Program for Women Infants and Children, Head Start, or the federal school lunch program. The bill requires new procedures to encourage enrollment in the Healthy Families Program.
Status: Introduced.
LLP Position: Support.

SB 21 (Martha Escutia, D–Norwalk)
Purpose: To make a statement regarding the intent of the Legislature to enact legislation to ensure that all lead hazards in all public schools in the state be identified and mitigated as quickly as possible.
Status: Introduced.
LLP Position: Support.

SB 41 (Deirdre Alpert, D–San Diego)
Purpose: To require the State Department of Education to request proposals for the development of model curricula, aligned with state content standards, on California Native American history, culture, and tribal sovereignty, to be incorporated into educational materials for pupils in grades 1 through 12. Appropriates $100,000 from the General Fund to the department for these purposes.
Status: Introduced.
LLP Position: Support.

Women's Issues

AB 4 (Patricia Bates, R–Laguna Nigel)
Purpose: To require people convicted of certain sex offenses to register with the campus chief of police and with the local Chief of Police or the Sheriff, for the rest of their lives and whenever they enroll in a state university, college, or community college.
Status: Introduced.
LLP Position: Neutral at present because we have misgivings about requiring lifelong registration.

AB 6 (Tony Cardenas, D–Mission Hills)
Purpose: To permit schools to establish before- and after-school enrichment programs for children, and establish maximum grants for these programs.
Status: Introduced.
LLP Position: Support.

Don't Know Who Represents You?
Send your request with a stamped, self-addressed envelope and we'll send you a complete list of your elected officials. Or go to www.lambdaletters.org to find out who represents you.

Tiny Boxes

by Boyce Hinman, Chief Lobbyist

"Domestic partners are two adults who have chosen to share one another's lives in an intimate and committed relationship of mutual caring."
—From AB 26, passed in 1999

Recently someone gave me his card. The card read, "Tom, Tom, and Tim." The names indicated they were a family of three gay men. (I changed the names to protect their privacy.) The card started me thinking again. Just what are we fighting for, especially as regards the recognition of our families?

Our nation has historically put the definition of "family" in little boxes. At first families were defined as two people of opposite genders, and of the same race, plus their children. Marriage by people of different faiths was not illegal, but it was frowned upon.

The ban on marriage by more than two people was reinforced in the mid-1800s. Utah was required to ban polygamy as a condition of statehood. In the 1950s the ban on interracial marriage was overturned by the courts. But marriage was still limited to two people of opposite gender. So far, the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender community was batting zero.

In the 1990s several states passed laws explicitly defining marriage as a contract of one woman and one man. In 1994 Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act. This act added the same definition to federal law. The Act allows states to refuse recognition of same-sex marriages that occur legally in other states. All of these were attempts to make that little box defining marriage indestructible.

So along comes the LGBT community saying we want to rewrite the definition of family. At this point the community had the chance to do either of two things: redefine the box or blow it up.

We chose to redefine the box. For example, AB 26 defines our families—domestic partnerships—as being between two people. There are provisions in the bill for opposite-gender couple domestic partnerships, but only if both those partners are over 62. AB 26 clearly leaves Tom, Tom, and Tim out in the cold. Almost certainly they are not the only such families in our community. Nor does AB 26 include mixed gneder families with two or more adults.

We need to rethink this issue. It's wrong to gain the rights of some by denying the rights of others. We should be willing to blow up the box and say that people, not laws, define families. Society, and government, should recognize, celebrate, and support families in all their many forms.

Obviously this subject raises troubling issues. Will it threaten the full recognition of two-member, same-sex families? It might. Certainly we should proceed with caution. However, the end goal should be to gain recognition of all families, not just those that fit into someone's little box. There must be a way to gain rights for two-member families while also working to secure the rights of all families, of all types. I invite conversation in the community on this issue. I am confident that, if we try, we can find the way.

Lavender Valentines

Lele Diamond & Rachel Field
have committed to each other and are now known as
Lele & Rachel Diamond Field.
Congratulations!

4" x 5"
(Whisler ad)

The Razor's Edge
Continued from page 1

in California; consider how much larger the political trophy is in the United States.

Taking Advantage of This Opportunity

To take advantage of this opportunity, we must make it clear that no candidate—or party—can take us for granted. In the past, the LGBT community has given unquestioning support to the Democratic Party. With the help of Democrats we have made progress, but it has been slow and intermittent, and our hard-fought gains have been spotty. Things are pretty good in California, but they are absolutely awful in Idaho. In the last analysis, the Democrats have been willing to drop us whenever the going got tough.

Suppose our community were to come to consensus on a specific, non-negotiable list of the rights and legal protections that we demand of elected officials. Suppose we went to candidates from every party and said that if they want our community's votes, money, and campaign volunteers, they must support our demands publicly in their campaign and enact them if they are elected to office. Suppose we voted as a block for those who accepted our demands and refused to support any candidate who refused to do so, regardless of the candidate's party. If we could pull that off, we'd get elected officials' attention right smartly.

Think this is all pie in the sky? Then think again about the razor-slim margin by which many candidates won election this year. Think about Governor Bush's very visible campaign to attract Latino/a voters this fall. That's just one example of targeted campaigning that candidates do all the time. There are many millions of LGBT voters in this country; there is no reason why we can't use that fact to attract targeted campaigning to our community.

A Specific Example to Test Our Strength

Let's test the concept in one legislative district—California Assembly District 80, for example. It's been in conservative Republican hands since 1994. However, according to the California Secretary of State's office, there are actually 4,860 more registered Democrats than Republicans. This year Republican David Kelley beat Democrat Joey Acuna by only 8,675 votes out of over 112,000 votes cast. Still more surprising, the number of registered Democrats is about 13,000 more than the number of people who voted for Kelley.

The Secretary of State says there are 179,045 registered voters in Assembly District 80. If just 2 percent of those registered voters are LGBT, then there would be 3,580 LGBT voters, of which a high percentage would be wealthy retired people in the Palm Springs area who have considerable money to support a candidate and the time to provide a vigorous volunteer effort.

It's high time our community started demanding more in return for our support. The facts that I have outlined here are an example of how we could experiment with doing just that. I urge our community to come together and give it a try.

Great Parental News!

In a historic decision, the California Board of Equalization awarded the same tax benefit to a lesbian couple that is granted to heterosexual couples. In a 3-to-2 decision, the board agreed to grant head-of-household status to Helmi Hisserich, who is the sole wage earner for herself, her partner, and their three-year-old child. Head-of-household status will reduce the state taxes owed by Helmi.

California appears to be the first state in the nation to say that, for tax purposes, lesbians can be considered parents of children who are not biologically their own. To be considered head of household, you cannot be married, you must contribute at least half of the cost of maintaining the home, and a child in the family must live with you for more than half the year. All kinds of people can claim head of household status, including single parents. Until now, nonbiological lesbian parents had not been able to do so.

Helmi and her family were represented by the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) in their battle before the State Board of Equalization. This is a major victory for the Center and for our community.

In 1997 Helmi claimed head of household status on her state income tax form, but was denied by the Franchise Tax Board. She then took her claim to the State Board of Equalization, which has the authority to overrule decisions by the FTB. The NCLR agreed to assist her and together they persuaded a majority of the Board of Equalization to approve her claim.

People who would like more information on this subject may call the National Center for Lesbian Rights at (415) 392-6257.

Fund-raising for Beginners

by Boyce Hinman, Chief Lobbyist

This is the first of a series of articles we will publish intermittently in this newsletter. We do it in the knowledge that our volunteers and members have always been the lifeblood of Lambda Letters. Our financial support has always come from individual members and friends like you, not from foundations or corporations. We hope that these articles will show you that fund-raising can be easy and fun.

Actually fund-raising always depends heavily on people like you. One of the greatest truisms in fund-raising is that people don't give to causes, they give to people with causes. Thus, if you strongly believe in the work of Lambda Letters you've already met the first requirement to being a successful fundraiser. In his book, *Achieving Excellence in Fund-raising*, Henry Russo lists the 13 most common methods of fund-raising in order of their effectiveness. Direct mail to purchased mailing lists is at the bottom of the list. Personal contacts with a potential donor is at the top of the list. Such contacts are effective, even when done by nonprofessionals, as long as the person asking for the gift is committed to the organization's mission and feels comfortable asking for the donation.

That leads us to the next point. Many people are embarrassed to ask for donations. Let's see if that's reasonable. Do you believe in Lambda Letters? Do you feel that the work it does is important? Do you understand that it takes money to do what we do? Are you impressed by the quality of our newsletter and sample letters and by the usefulness of the services we provide? If the answer to all those questions is yes, then you have no reason to be embarrassed about asking people to donate to Lambda Letters. In many cases they will say you have done them a favor by telling them about us.

Some people don't ask for donations because they are afraid people will say no. That's a reality. In his book, Russo reiterates that you must ask the many to get a yes from the few. With mail solicitations, for example, he says you can expect no better than a one- or two-percent positive response rate. You can expect to do better when you are asking friends and family. Remember, personal solicitation is always more effective than mailers.

Undoubtedly many people will say no. The key is to ask nicely and withdraw gracefully if you get a no. That may allow you to ask again at a later time. The other key is to ask lots of people. If you do that the percentages will be in your favor. Eventually you will hit pay dirt.

We will continue this subject in further issue of the newsletter. See you then.

Women's Issue

Continued from page 3

cancer was dropped post-surgery, causing her stitches to tear open. Many women discovered by accident that they tested positive for certain diseases—the prison authorities never told them. Still others are still waiting to be retested four years after the prison discovered (and the major media exposed) that its contracted laboratory faked hundreds of HIV, hepatitis, and cancer results.

These examples are just a sampling of conditions that lawmakers of both political parties (during the October hearing) frequently called outrageous.

Personal stories at this hearing indicated that the moment women enter the correctional system—mostly for nonviolent offenses or crimes of self-defense—they become throwaways, not worthy of the most basic acts of humanity.

What is to be done? Well-trained public health nurses with high professional standards should immediately replace all MTAs within any prison where they are used. An impartial panel of public health doctors should examine the medical records of the women who died. These remedies may stem the flow of death from Chowchilla until more systemic changes can be put into place.

With this month's letter, Lambda Letters members can join Legal Services for Prisoners with Children, Justice NOW, California Prison Focus, California Coalition for Women Prisoners, the Prison Activist Resource Center, and others to ask Senator Polanco to investigate the deaths at the Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla and legislate the replacement of MTAs with nurses.

B Movies Make Me Cry

by Lynn Dobbs

President Elect Bush will be sworn in as the 43rd President of the United States soon and the Senate will begin the long process of confirming — or not — nominees for the administration's top administrative and policy positions. The drama might be less compelling than the battles involved with the Florida vote count, but the consequences are just as far reaching. For the next four or eight years, the executive branch of government is likely to follow Ronald Reagan's philosophy of social and economic justice.

Meanwhile the Democrats are preparing and implementing a strategy they hope will shift both houses of the US Congress back to their control. And they are hoping that President George W. Bush will fall on his sword in his first term to the extent that he can't win a second term.

The national political scene is a B movie with real life consequences. We could name it "The Parties that Ate Civil Liberty."

"And now for something completely different." (Thank you, Monty Python.)

When we list off the qualities we admire in people, loyalty often makes the list. Even the Boy Scouts of America think it is an important trait for young scouts to cultivate.

This begs the question, "Loyal to what?"

I remember the rhetoric of the late sixties when American involvement in Viet Nam was being strongly questioned and more strongly defended. One of the slogans oft shouted was "My Country, Right or Wrong." Is that the kind of loyalty we should embrace? I didn't think so in 1967 and I don't think so now.

Am I loyal to a person, group or nation? No. However, I am loyal to concepts such as nonviolence, love and justice. My relationships with people are based in our common humanity, in mutual understanding of each other's philosophy and in the integrity of those involved. So, for me it's only "My Country When It's Right."

"The Parties that Ate Civil Liberty" stars two monsters. Each monster promises that it will change the face of America and spells out the paradise to come. Each asks for loyalty and dedication so that it can create its version of paradise. Then each turns to the other and the battle begins. Of course, the battle destroys everything in its path.

And each monster requires a loyal band of followers from whom it can draw strength. Each monster must suck the philosophical blood from its supporters to create an army of the undead to cheer and shout, and to protest and condemn regardless of the ethics of the actions. I'm reminded of the tightly scripted so-called presidential debates and the "spontaneous demonstrations" surrounding the vote counting in Florida. I feel like I've been in the spin cycle long enough.

In California a couple of years ago, the LGBT community was drunk with the possibilities that came with a Democrat-controlled legislature and a Democrat as governor. So, what did we get?

The legislature killed, many times, marriage limit laws, but the the radical conservatives took the issue directly to the public, lied through their teeth and got it passed. We did get Domestic Partnerships two sessions ago. Of course, the initial legislation was pitiful and further watered down through legislative negotiations. So last session amendments were passed to add some real value so that people who love each other wouldn't be denied basic human dignity in times of emotional trauma. We worked hard to get the amendments through the legislature and on to the governor's desk. He vetoed every single one.

I say it is time to stop being loyal to one or the other monster. It is time to find an ideological voice that is loud, strong, proud and powerful. In the last 50 years we have witnessed loud, strong, proud voices fighting for civil rights and human justice in African American civil rights, the rights of women, the rights of LGBT people and to end the Viet Nam war.

Where is our loud, strong, proud, powerful voice now? Is it enough that a candidate for President or Governor say "Gay and Lesbian" without looking as if he had bitten a green persimmon?

I call on us to join as many local, statewide and national organizations as we can, even if their main issues aren't directly our issues. As a start, I suggest the following state and national groups: Lambda Letters Project (LLP), California Alliance for Pride and Equality (CAPE), the National Lesbian and Gay Task Force (NGLTF), the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), BiNet USA and GenderPAC. These groups can be found on the Web.

Let's be loyal to individual candidates who fight our fights and who have the integrity to stand even when it is politically dangerous for them to stand. And let us stand and be counted especially when it is dangerous!